

Seeking the welfare of the city

a collection of papers on the interaction
of the Church with the Public Policy
process



Social Issues Committee

Anglican Diocese of Sydney

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The Social Issues Committee exists to provide advice on matters of social concern and public policy to the Archbishop of Sydney and the Standing Committee of Synod; to inform, educate and challenge Anglicans in the Diocese about social issues from a Christian perspective; and to interact with the public policy process to ensure that the values of the gospel are heard in the consideration of public affairs.

The Committee was formed in 1977, and has published a wide range of materials over the past 21 years, ranging from bioethical issues to the prison system. Committee members come from a wide variety of specialist disciplines, to provide insights into many areas of social concern and public policy.

Chairman: The Very Reverend Boak Jobbins, Dean of Sydney
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Introduction

In mid-1998, the Social Issues Committee was confronted with a number of pieces of legislation dealing with questions of homosexuality and discrimination. However, the debate didn't remain focused on the details of the legislation, but rather became an exploration of the role of a Church social and public policy body, and indeed the role of the Christian, in interacting with the public policy process.

The positions on the Committee ranged from wanting to speak out in defence of God's law to not wanting to impose one minority group's viewpoint on any other group.

In order to assist in working through these issues, the Committee invited three Christian professionals working in the area of public policy to address a special forum in August 1998, to give us an insight into the following questions:

- 1.) Given the nature of Australian society, what are reasonable public policy outcomes for the Social Issues Committee to seek?
- 2.) What are the best, and most appropriate means of achieving such ends?

The Committee found the papers very helpful. We have decided to publish them to help other Christians to think through this important area.

BOAK JOBBINS, Chairman
for and on behalf of the Social Issues Committee

Emerging Global Practice: *The New Public Affairs Model*

Dr. Craig S. Fleisher
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Almost any senior public affairs decision-maker will tell you that managing corporate public affairs has always been a challenging endeavour even during the so-called “best of times. The “best of times” this likely is not for corporate organizations and their executives responsible for steering the organization through the vagaries of the public policy environment.

However, this is the environment facing organizations in the late 1990s. It should not be surprising that many larger organizations are reassessing their participation in the public policy process and their entire approach to managing public affairs. You regularly hear about this reassessment when you engage in both public and private discussions that take place during many of the professional association sponsored workshops and conferences that take place across the globe.

For those individuals and organizations who have not (and possibly some who have) had the benefit of first-person observation, this article will attempt to synthesize much of what is happening to the global management of public affairs. It describes the forces driving the changes and addresses the ways corporations are responding to these forces. Finally, the article offers an argument of the “New Public Affairs” model as it will likely be practised in North America, EU and perhaps elsewhere, at least early into the next decade.

Driving Forces

Conditions facing an organization or an industry change because important forces are driving participants to alter their actions. Often called “driving forces,” these conditions have the biggest influence on what kinds of changes will take place in the business environment. Driving forces can also be studied at the industry or practice level, as this article will do.

In performing driving forces analysis of the public policy environment facing organizations, this article will provide arguments providing an assessment of two things: 1) identifying what the driving forces are and 2) assessing the impact they will have. The most difficult thing about doing this analysis is separating the major and minor causes of change. Most experts suggest that these analyses should uncover only 3 to 4 forces or else the filtering process has not been thorough enough.

There are a number of driving forces that are requiring organizations to reassess their public affairs practices and the ways that these are managed. Some of these have been developing gradually over the years while others have developed more rapidly. I have separated these into external and internal categories for ease of discussion.

External

Losses of public trust in institutions including government, business, church and mass media.

Publics in many western countries have been losing faith and trust in their governments. Numerous surveys conducted throughout the 1990s have shown that these publics seek campaign finance reforms but have not been satisfied with legislative attempts to date. A number of high profile ethics breaches and/or allegations thereof involving fund-raising, privacy, sexual harassment and abuse of power have further reinforced the public's view that public policy is being developed by individuals and groups who have lost sight of the public's interest. The ongoing perception of the inordinate influence of special interest power and its impact on public decision making both in industry and social concerns also creates greater cynicism among the public. Last but not least, some surveys have also shown that the public no longer expects politicians will or can keep the promises they make once elected. It should be unsurprising that many public policy observers talk of an increasingly "fickle" electorate.

The public is also increasingly cynical of corporate motives and actions. The public has always seemed to have a "love-hate" relationship with its corporations. This relationship has iterated through fairly regular cycles through the decades. The vigorous consumer activism during the sixties, community activism during the seventies, environmental activism of the sixties and eighties, and the new found investor activism of the nineties have generated an ongoing stream of stakeholder missives to modify corporate activity. All these stakeholders continue to scrutinize corporate activity and inactivity. Industrial relations have also gone through similar cycles and increasing globalization and the movement of work to low-wage countries has done little to quell this area of stakeholder criticism. Falling trust has put companies in the awkward position of having to apologize for being "too profitable" or "too successful." Lastly, many successful Chief Executive Officers now have to actively offer a public defense for their organizations giving them huge salary and performance-based pay outs.

The long-established church organizations in western countries have been generally experiencing steady drops in membership and church attendance. Similar to the ethical problems facing government, a number of high profile ethical breaches have been splashed in the media and many churches are being accused of being "out of step" with contemporary needs. This trend has been occurring despite a noticeable upturn in people seeking to fulfil their perceived spiritual needs and lamenting the lack of emphasis placed on these needs in other, secular institutions.

The media has also suffered erosion in its credibility. Individuals are no longer able to discriminate between news, info-tainment, entertainment, and paid or unpaid broadcasts. The

public in general is regularly unable to name network anchor-persons or top reporters. Content analyses have demonstrated that the percentage of published or broadcast news devoted to weightier, policy-oriented matters has been on a steady decline while at the same time “news you can use” or entertaining news designed to capture people’s attention (e.g., OJ Simpson trial, US President Clinton’s alleged affair with an office intern) have been on the increase.

Globalization

The development of world markets in financial services, communications, and transportation has had immense impacts on the public affairs environment. No longer can individuals or organizations hide behind physical barriers or the “tyranny of distance” that once separated them from others. For example, consider how difficult it is to identify the source and destination of capital or informational currency that globally flow around the clock or the source of messages posted 24 hours a day to internet-based bulletin boards, newsgroups and web sites. Another evolving example is the impact of the newly instituted European currency/monetary unit. It allows for the good and services of about a dozen, and eventually more, European countries to be immediately compared and traded. This development impacts any individual nation-state’s ability to leverage their economies using the standard economic tools of monetary and fiscal policy. Globalization has also been a key factor underlying the consolidation that has occurred in industries such as financial services, telecommunications and broadcasting. Globalization means that multinational organizations are being challenged to demonstrate how their presence benefits the nation-state hosting them while concurrently, it is increasingly difficult to identify an organization, products/services or employees as being associated with any particular nationality.

Technology has expanded and fragmented communication channels

People around the world have better access than ever before to more information than ever before. Passive observation of the media falls by the wayside in which individuals have the ability to choose where and from whom information is acquired. In one test market of a major satellite broadcasting service in Colorado, residents in one city have immediate access to over 300 broadcast television and radio stations. They have even greater information access using the Internet. Decision-making is now both more transparent and accessible through means such as the Internet, dedicated policy channels (e.g., C-SPAN in the U.S., PNN in Australia) and broad- and narrowcasting. This allows the public to be a more vigilant watchdog of governmental activities; subsequently, responsive governments become more vigilant overseers and regulators of corporate and other organizational activity. This level of oversight means that decision-making can no longer be made in the dark recesses of executive, legislative or bureaucratic boardrooms without being quickly exposed to the penetrating light of stakeholder scrutiny. This can be a catch-22 as calls for increased disclosure may sometimes compel some decision-makers and decisions to retreat into the backrooms.

Internal

Integrating communications

It has become increasingly difficult to get messages cleanly and quickly through channels so that receivers accurately understand what the sender intended. Individuals in organizations have been bombarded by so many messages (i.e., “noise”) for so long the resultant data overload leads to communication breakdowns. What busy executive does not complain about the stack of unread newsletters and memos in their already overburdened inboxes?

Human capacities to process information have not increased to match the efficiency levels achieved by our new technologies. Organizations are trying to address this situation by re-balancing the channels utilized, whether these are face-face, oral, visual, electronic or other means. Nevertheless, part of the difficulty goes beyond identifying the appropriate channel and comes back to the content of the message itself. In environments where trust and truth is lacking, the best channels and messages cannot overcome receivers' resistance caused by their belief that the sender, and therefore the message sent, lacks credibility.

Dealing with change and complexity

One theme that has permeated organizations throughout the nineties has been constant and continual change. The half-life of knowledge and practices in most business disciplines has been shrunk by communication and information technology to its shortest levels since people started communicating. Management and technical skills gained only a few years ago may already be out of date and currency. Industries, products, processes, "world-class" practices and technologies have decreasing life spans meaning that it has become more difficult to sustain competitive marketplace advantages.

Focus on resources and core competencies

Organizations have been faced with a bewildering array of management fads and fashions over the last ten years. Whether it was/is one of the three lettered varieties like ABC, MBO, EVA, SAP, MVA, TQM, or employee empowerment, team building, benchmarking, learning organizations, reengineering, and strategic outsourcing, the bandwagons and their guru sponsors have been departing the station at an astonishingly recurrent pace. A commoditisation of prices, product capabilities, and technologies has occurred at least partly because it is so much easier to imitate anything a competitor does than to innovate. This "me-too" or lemming effect forces organizations to dig more deeply and smartly into the available stock of creativity, knowledge and technological resources in order to carve out profit among short-lived lucrative competitive opportunities. Many of these endeavours have forced organizations to renew their focus on the interplay between the elements of environment, organization and strategy. Much of the understanding we have of this driver is now captured by scholars under the rubric of "resource-based" theories of strategy.

Moving Away from the Traditional PA Model

What do all of these changes mean for public affairs practice? As the public policy environment facing institutions has changed, so too have the types of responses required to be effective in organizational interactions with public policy. Nearly all the traditional models of public affairs in common practice during the 1980s have experienced substantial stresses that have lessened their effectiveness.

Traditional media relations practices, the primary domain of public relations and external communications activity for many years, are no longer as effective as before due to channel fragmentation, the lessening of reliance on and reliability of traditional broadcasting networks, and the blurring between entertainment, information, and news. As the media channels to various target audiences further fragment, communicators must more directly target message-delivery processes, even going back to old stand-bys such as face-to-face communication. Developments such as electronic bulletin boards, VNRs, broadcast faxes, and WWW sites mean that organizations

can now efficiently use direct communications modes with their stakeholders and bypass the filtering effects of the traditional media broadcast.

Traditional government relations practice such as access and relationship-based lobbying has become less influential. This has occurred due to several reasons, most prominent among these including: term limits legislation has been passed or is being considered in many jurisdictions, strict contribution limits have been put into place, and the general public remains averse to any activity that smacks of “buying” public policy decisions. It is no longer wise to rely *only* on access-based lobbyists (i.e., permanent government relations staffers in the federal and state capitals), “hired-guns” (i.e., the top contract lobbyists) and financial contributions to generate policy makers’ support.

Traditional community relations practices have also withered in prominence as the bar of community expectations of organizational performance has risen. In the past, my academic colleagues in the business community described these as “discretionary” corporate activities whereas now the expectation of the public is for corporations to help solve basic community problems. Corporations frequently responded to community calls/demands for assistance by “throwing money at the problem” through corporate foundations, philanthropic and sponsorship programs. These programs are now seen as a baseline measure for an organization’s intent on being a good community partner; however, this creates problems of the public viewing corporations as acting out of less than altruistic motives. Sponsorships can sometimes backfire as has occurred with the tobacco industry’s sponsorships of major sporting events. Even social service or welfare organizations are being asked to do far more than their limited resources can hope to support using the traditional models.

Traditional employee or member communications have relied upon organizational attempts to influence policy through a one-way, asymmetric model. PR academicians describe this pattern as the press agency or publicity model. Under this model, the organization’s executives tell employees what the organization thinks they must know and does not necessarily listen to what the employees think the organization should hear. Unfortunately for those organizations still practising this model, employees have become increasingly critical of one-sided and obviously unbalanced messages no matter their source. Employees or organizational members also have little time or need to read the standard “happy go lucky” employee newsletter of the past since it neither informs them nor helps them to better perform their jobs. Decreasing employee tolerance for organizational “double speak,” the need for political correctness, the inability to break through the “noise,” and poorly communicating supervisors that have not received effective (if any) communication training have also lessened the impact of traditional employee communication prescriptions.

To summarize, the traditional modes for practising community relations, employee communications, government affairs, and media relations have lost their ability to help an organization achieve success in its key stakeholder relationships. Practice in these areas has generally been slow to respond to the driving forces present in today’s environment. Nevertheless, a number of organizations have managed to constructively respond to these forces. They exhibit the characteristics of what I call the “new public affairs” model.

Prescriptions for Practising the New Public Affairs

The new public affairs model is emerging and powerful. It does not look anything like its more traditional counterpart. Those individuals or organizations that refuse to recognize the changes

augured by the new PA model will be at an increasing disadvantage in their public policy process and business marketplace participation. Those organizations that do choose to “compete” in this marketplace using the traditional prescriptions will increasingly be outflanked and outfoxed by public policy marketplace competitors that have adapted and continue to respond to the changes.

Practising the new public affairs model requires organizations to exhibit a number of coherent characteristics, the sum of which constitutes the new model. From a functional or activity-based perspective, the new PA model is characterized by an organization that:

Manages public affairs as an ongoing, year-round process both internally and externally

The new PA is not reactive or just crisis responsive; instead, it relies upon a deep and institutionalized organizational understanding of issues. This understanding does not reside entirely and only in the public affairs function or among its practitioners. It is fed out into the executive, operations, and the front line, becoming something that everybody in the organization remains sensitive toward. This understanding and sensitivity also extends and applies to the organization’s many partners in the public policy management process including its contracted agencies, associations, coalition partners, communicators, and consultants. Last but certainly not least, the organization strives to understand how issues in the future will affect it by engaging in at least periodic strategic thinking around issue scenarios and possible futures.

Cultivates and harvests the capability to build, develop and maintain enduring stakeholder relationships

New PA organizations neither just come into a community, promising lots of jobs and investment nor expect a community to support it nor do they just casually show up in a legislative capitol only when they are threatened or when their interests are under attack. Instead, these organizations rely both internally and externally upon stakeholder education, partnerships, alliances and real investments of resources in stakeholder relationships. This is exemplified by a community investment approach in which organizational resources are relevant to bettering the organization’s community over the long term. Lastly, stakeholders are no longer viewed only as constraints but as opportunities. This leads new PA model organizations to replace combative stakeholder approaches with consensus building and seeking methods.

Influences stakeholders using refined information (i.e., intelligence)

Influence no longer comes only in the form of financial resources, whether this is money used for lobbying, social betterment or philanthropic purposes. Rather than throwing money at problems, astute new model PA practitioners recognize that influence increasingly comes in the form of growing intelligence, employment, and knowledge resources. In an era in which public policy makers at all levels are routinely expected to do more for the public with less resources, it becomes imperative that organizations assist these decision makers by delivering inputs that add value to public decision making processes and outputs. New PA model organizations can persuasively demonstrate the creation, not just transfer, of wealth.

Recognizes the importance of managing the grassroots

The high street has become at least as if not more important than a legislative parliament in the development of effective public policy. Showing the impacts of organizational or public policy on the home electorate carries more weight than how it impacts matters within the hallowed halls in

Washington, Ottawa, or Canberra. Grassroots are now almost always used to support and supplement traditional access-based lobbying; however, these efforts must be real grassroots and not astro-turf. Genuine support for an issue is significantly different than the intentional manipulation of uninformed persons to create the appearance of support. Approaches that rely upon intimidation or bullying tactics of what my friend and grassroots guru Ed Grefe terms the “family” or “friend” stakeholder categories are not effective and are avoided in the new model. Last but not least, the most capable organizations in the public policy arena sensitize and empower their entire “family” (i.e., everyone who is a member of the organization), not just a select few persons at the top of the organization.

Communicates in an integrated manner

External communications in the new PA model is more research-based, less rivalrous, and more two-way symmetric in nature. New PA communicators are persuasive and skilled verbal and visual presenters as opposed to just being skilled readers or writers. Stakeholder communication is based on the “facts” contained in empirical economic and social data and is presented in an articulate and trustworthy manner. Vehicles used to communicate reach all stakeholders in the ways they prefer to be reached, even in cross-cultural settings. New PA model practitioners understand and have the ability to unleash the capabilities of the full array of evolving and evolved communication technologies ranging from age-old face-to-face methods to the newest digital-based methods such as video bulletin boards, broadcast e-mail, voice mail and fax broadcasts, intranets, and satellite networks. All stakeholders are routinely counselled and educated in terms of how the organization impacts the public and its interests. These communications become empowering by helping stakeholders know what they can do and how they may take action. Finally, the organization and its decision makers practice and know when to utilize consensus-building disciplines for resolving stakeholder disputes such as alternative dispute resolution methods (i.e., arbitration, mediation, mini trials, moderated settlement conferences) as opposed to having to rely mostly on litigation and other zero sum game legal processes.

Continuously aligns its strategy with the public’s interests

The ability to be politically germane over time, whereby an organization is able to consistently demonstrate how its policies and actions align with the public’s values is also a key indicator of whether the new PA model is in place. Where this alignment exists, reputation improves and becomes a critical leveraging point for organizations that are unable to differentiate their outputs using the traditional communication and marketing tools. Ethics and ethical sensitivity is prominent in new PA organizations since understanding the organization’s stakeholder relationships is critical in achieving harmony between the organization and its stakeholders. Stakeholders come to trust the organization and know that it deserves to be a credible voice in the development of effective public policy.

Improves its external relations using the accepted facets of contemporary management practice

The new PA model is strategic as opposed to tactical or technical. Being strategic, it is systematically and proactively focused on helping the organization perform more successfully in both the public policy and product marketplaces over the long term. The model provides behavioural guidance to everyone throughout the organization. It is heavily management and policy-oriented; planning and implementation rely primarily upon research and facts as opposed to instincts and opinions. It also institutionalizes improvement processes so that the organization can build upon its public policy marketplace learning and knowledge base as opposed to having

these advantages reside in an individual. Lastly, decision makers operating under the model exhibit strategic thinking and have earned a place at the executive decision-making table by demonstrating how effective communication helps meet the organization's vision and goals.

The new PA model I described has been inductively derived, meaning that I have pieced it together by observing the actions of organizations in their environments. The new PA model appears to be in practice to some extent in a number of organizations today although those are often non-corporate entities. Who presently practices this new model the best? The most influential pressure groups should serve as the benchmark of the new public affairs. Among the best of these exhibiting the characteristics of the new PA model include various groups representing senior's interests, small business, professionals involved in law and medicine, and religious oriented concerns like the Christian Coalition or Israeli action committees. Each of these has achieved excellent levels of performance in the public policy market place through its practice of the new model. Whether they can sustain their performance over time will depend on how adaptable they remain to the changing environment.

Implications of the New PA Model for the Anglican Church

Outside of being a satisfied parishioner at St. Barnabas Broadway during my family's one year stay in Sydney, this paper's author cannot claim the benefits of a long association with or studious analysis of the activities of the Social Issues Committee of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney; despite that shortcoming, I would like to offer a few thoughts about church groups' participation in public policy environments based on scholarly observations I have undertaken in North America and the European Union. The points I would suggest deserve serious consideration in the development of a policy position include:

The Church must be active. When the church does not participate in public policy debates, it cedes public policy processes and outcomes to those who may have adverse interests. My experience suggests when the Church vacates an institutional area, Christian values and beliefs are quickly lost. For example, when Christians leave public school systems, then the positive moral codes that govern what teachers taught leaves with them. When Christians vacate the media, then a secular approach to defining important matters strongly takes root. When Christians stay out of political decision making positions, then many righteous decisions remain unmade.

The Church must not apologize for its beliefs and values. You won't see other activist groups apologizing for theirs. Homosexuals have gone public, individuals using illegal drugs have gone public, people with exotic diseases have gone public, and a variety of other controversial groups are out there bringing their message to the messages and to decision makers. The message and behaviours of Christians must be powerfully present and visible in policy debates without apology. The Church must be active at both the grassroots and the grassstops... one without the other cannot thrive. Sending the archbishop and/or prominent church workers out into policy debates is only part of the solution. Democracies respond to numbers and what is viewed to be in the majority interest. The Church is most influential when ALL its members, down to the last parishioner, cares enough to act about the injustices or unrighteousness they observe. We are all part of the body and every member has unique gifts that can make a difference for Him.

The Church can't be complacent or let our relative affluence blind us to the problems present right here in our own communities (back yard, neighbourhoods, districts, city, etc.). One of the biggest problems the church has experienced is not reaching out to those truly in need where

they need to be reached. Sometimes those in need are unwilling or unable to come to church. Sometimes they have needs that cannot only be met on Sundays. Thank goodness that Jesus didn't turn away from the lepers, prostitutes, drug users and family breakers of His day. He knew that the societal condition was defined by the "least of these," not the best of these. We can't afford to overlook the "least of these" either.

The Church can't just speak to itself/ourselves. We can't be covert Christians and properly fulfil the will of Christ. We are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Salt must come out the shaker to have any impact on the meat it is supposed to season or preserve and light must shine on the darkness. The Church cannot retreat within in its own walls and simultaneously make a difference in society. Thank goodness that Jesus didn't spend all His time inside church walls! The Church can't affiliate directly with political parties but rather must engage public policy on an issue-by-issue policy approach. Political parties are a human artifact and have different ultimate and temporal purposes than the Church. The Church must remain vigilantly non-partisan and let its people make the difference where and how they best can. Christians can contribute to policy development in most any party that respects the principle of freedom of religion. While involved, church members must stay alert to avoid co-optation by the world and its values or risk being secularised and lose those properties of salt that make us so unique and vital to bringing people to saving grace.

The Church must verify its words by action and not just hear about them. This action gives us credibility to speak about the matters that are important to us. People must see our good works and how we glorify our Father through these. On a related note, those actions and words should be scripturally-based. The scriptures were defined by one commentator as our "activist's manual" and we have much in the way of instruction to acquire in it.

Last but not least, the Church must remember to pray for, and be willing to talk with, our government. Government acts as a minister of God, not the other way around. We have been instructed to give to Caesar what is due Caesar, and to God what is due Him. The Lord's Prayer also provides excellent guidelines to this (hallowed by your name, thy will, thy kingdom, thine is the power, thine is the glory, forever and ever) matter.

Summary

This article puts forth an argument that traditional functional PA practices have lost their effectiveness in light of the changes that have occurred in both the external and internal environment of business. Someone who was reading a textbook - assuming one could be found in the first place - from any of these stakeholder communication and management areas would likely be at a disadvantage in practising successful management of public affairs. But this does not mean that those who have been practising on-the-job have done any better at recognizing and adapting to these changes. Indeed, practising the new public affairs means that PA decision-makers will need to rely on and seek to achieve a balance between both practice and theory, research and instinct, planning and creativity, wisdom and experience.

My general observation that the traditional practices have lost their efficacy should point in the direction of another contemporary problem in the corporate public affairs field. The state of knowledge about managing public affairs phenomena is immature. This makes it difficult to just apply a standard set of heuristics. Few proofs, silver bullets, "truths" or enduring conceptualisations exist in this area. An article like this one that attempts to describe the "new public affairs" should be viewed with some measure of skepticism, especially since it is difficult

to place its prescriptions in any historical or scholarly derived theoretical contexts. Despite the previous caveat, attempts to describe and document the evolving practice in important fields like public affairs should always be welcome and put under the microscope of debate, discussion and practice.

Suggested References

1. Among the books that best reflect components of the new public affairs model I have described would be the following half dozen, all of which have been published in the last three years:

Ashley, W. & J. Morrison, *Anticipatory management*, Leesburg, VA: IAP, 1995.

Caywood, C., *The handbook of strategic public relations and integrated communications*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1997.

Fleisher, C. *Assessing, managing and maximizing public affairs performance*, Washington, DC: Public Affairs Council, 1997.

Grefe, E, & M. Linsky *The new corporate activism*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1996

Heath, R. *Strategic issues management*, London: Sage, 1997

Mack, C. *Business, politics and the practice of government relations*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1997.

2. Several associations and university-based groups are also producing conferences, courses, programs, publications, or workshops on the new PA model both inside and outside the U.S. including:

Canadian Council for Public Affairs Advancement - www.wlu.ca/~wwwccpaa

Centre for Corporate Public Affairs (Australia) - www.ozone.com.au/~accpa

Manchester Metropolitan University's Centre for Corporate & Public Affairs (UK) - hubble.fmb.stu.mmu.ac.uk/ccpa

George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management - www.gwu.edu/~gspm

Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism - www.nwu.edu

Public Affairs Council (USA) - www.pac.org

God's care in action

Terry Cunningham
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The world is continually telling the Church to “stick to its knitting”. The assumption behind this comment is that the Church exists to provide religious activities for “the religiously-inclined” and for “the weak”.

Why does the world think this way? One obvious reason is that the world's thinking has yet to be redeemed. But we cannot excuse ourselves so easily.

Another reason is that Christianity too often has appeared sanctimonious, self-righteous and unconcerned with the suffering of those in need.

At times, the Church has appeared unwilling to tackle “life's big problems” and has excused itself from championing change for the oppressed. Because of this, our nation in some measure has failed to understand that the Gospel of Jesus Christ really does make a difference both here and now, and in eternity.

In May this year, I conducted some research for ANGLICARE - the welfare arm of the Anglican Church - with a desire to explore public perceptions on (1) Australia's major social issues/problems, and (2) who could solve (or help solve) these problems.

The problems raised by the research participants were wide-ranging and included: youth suicide, land rights, unemployment, the environment, disaster response, immigration, the health system, drug abuse, poverty, domestic violence, family breakdown, mental health care, child abuse, aged care, street kids, tax, workplace relations and education.

The results were interesting. People look to (1) the Government, (2) general care agencies, and (3) Church-linked care agencies for solutions. The Church received no ratings at all.

Strangely, while most people look to the Government for answers, they also lack confidence in it. General care agencies are seen to be “doing good things”. Church-linked care agencies are suspected (by some) of having a secret agenda. The Church is seen as irrelevant. People do not believe the Church has the necessary answers.

Many people hear the Gospel and experience Christian culture for the first time through organisations such as ANGLICARE. Personal crisis is often the reason for this contact. ANGLICARE therefore occupies the “middle-ground” between public and Church cultures - acting as a bridge to the Church.

This bridging can be seen in our “seamless” welfare, chaplaincy, urban mission and cross cultural ministry programs - which guide people from the place of crisis or dislocation to the place of commitment to Christ and then to the Parish.

Once we agree that the Church should take a strong stand on social issues in the public arena - and I believe it should - we then need to examine ourselves.

There is a tendency for gifts of the Spirit to “departmentalise” within the Church. Self-confirming views coagulate at various points within the Church, with the attendant danger that different gifts will be regarded as less important.

“The hands” may come to think they are independent (or worse still, that they are the entire body). “The mouths” may come to believe they do not need ears to listen, feet for mobility, or hands to touch.

Paul faced a church where people said “I belong to Paul”, “I belong to Apollos”, “I belong to Cephas” or “I belong to Christ”. Paul asked “Is Christ divided?” To be effective, we need to recognise that God has a plan for us to accomplish *together*.

Commenting on the findings of the National Church Life Survey, researcher John Bellamy says: “Often evangelism and social action are presented as competing aims. Some people emphasise one at the expense of the other. Both are necessary and are in fact complementary facets of a vital Church. Clearly, an outward focus is an important characteristic of vital congregations.”

An outward orientation involves speaking the gospel in “the marketplace”, binding up wounds, and speaking up (sometimes loudly) to correct social ills.

When we talk to non-Christians, it is clear that they are looking for a message of hope along with practical care. If we are afraid to speak against injustice, how will they believe in a God who opposes injustice?

I have often been asked by people within the Media what we, as a Church, provide in the way of caring services. At that point they make a decision on the relevance of our Church and the validity of our message. In fact at that moment they make a decision on the relevance of Christ himself.

Social action and welfare work are not the same. But they are intimately connected. One of the ways they are connected is that the Church does not have credibility to make comment on major social issues unless it does so on the basis of experience gained in welfare work.

Welfare work is proof that the Church does in fact care. It is the grass roots experience and

intelligence necessary for Church planning and church planting. It is the experience that helps the Church explain why a certain issue is important. And it gives people a reason to listen to our message.

Suppose the Church wants to make a comment in the Media on street kids. This comment has impact only when it is connected to the experience of caring for street kids, through programs such as ANGLICARE's Parramatta Youth Project or Priority Youth.

The same can be said of aged care issues. Archbishop Goodhew has observed many times that the Anglican Church is a "significant player" in the aged care sector because of the work of ANGLICARE Chesalon Aged Services.

The Church earns the right to speak on a social issue when it "gets its hands dirty".

Paul calls us to "work together with him (God)" in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 6:2). He is writing to the whole church at Corinth, and all of the saints in the whole of Achaia, not just the church planting apostles or those gifted as preachers.

He reminds us that "There are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." (1 Cor 12:4-7). We are urged to "strive to excel in building up the Church" (1 Cor 14:12). Each and every gift is absolutely necessary to the success of the Gospel.

What is the basis for the Church doing anything in the world? It is that "God so loved the world...". What makes us his people? Surely it must be reflecting God's love in a fallen world.

We have a God who is concerned about us having daily food (the Lord's Prayer), as well as equipping us to live in his house forever (Ps 23).

Jesus saw his own ministry as multidimensional. He tell sus in his own mission statement (Luke 4:18-19): "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

Can you imagine a Gospel where Jesus walks past the woman found in adultery, does nothing to address the sin of the crowd, leaves her to be stoned to death, fulfilling the law but showing no practical mercy?

Can you imagine a Gospel where the apostles decide that feeding widows and children is not important and fail to appoint deacons to look after their welfare?

Can you imagine a Gospel where Paul fails to take up an offering for the believers in Jerusalem? Or where Paul is left to rot in prison and no-one, absolutely no-one, helps him? Or where a boy keeps the fish and bread to himself and thousands upon thousands of people go hungry and miss out on a personal and highly relevant experience God's care?

Can you imagine a Gospel without the story of the Good Samaritan - a shining example of what Christian love should be? One without a woman who gave her last coin - an act highly commended by Jesus?

Preaching to a drug addict stretched out on the footpath will not necessarily bring him to Christ. Helping him to become well enough to understand what I am saying about Jesus may. He will certainly have experienced the love of Christ. And herein lies great opportunity.

We also have a responsibility to prevent the circumstances that caused such an addiction.

We have to learn when to be merciful, when to be direct. Encouragement in the face of disaster can be disastrous. Similarly, preaching at someone when they are in need can be personally satisfying but largely unhelpful - depending on the moment. Jesus showed immense wisdom in how to handle "the moment".

What is the most appropriate action or response, as a group, as a Church, to the social ills we see around us? The questions we should ask ourselves as a group are much the same as the questions we should ask ourselves as individuals.

When the question becomes "How can I apply my gift most effectively in this situation and with the maximum degree of cohesion with those of other giftings?", yes/no arguments, and arguments about priority, become obsolete.

Should the Church be pro-active in engaging governments? Certainly. Should the Church become "political"? Certainly not. If the Church is driven by a worldly political agenda then it becomes a servant of the political arena rather than a guide for politics and politicians.

Michael Hill wrote an excellent discussion paper called "An Evangelical Rationale for Social Action". This was released by the Social Issues Committee in 1996.

Hill asks whether the Church should be involved in social action or not. He also examines the question of priority - is social action "more important" than evangelism or vice versa.

He suggests that the end result depends on the individual Christian's gifts, and the demands of the context. He concludes by saying that because we are a "body" we should respond to social issues both as individuals and as a group. The Social Issues Committee is just such a group.

I believe it is extremely unhelpful to talk of "evangelism" and "social action/welfare" as being "sides". This leads us to think, incorrectly, of a set of scales where if something is up on one side it must be down on the other. Our thinking then becomes controlled by thoughts of who is on top, party politics, compromises and concessions.

Let us instead think of our various gifts as part of a wheel of activity, with all of the gifts being applied full-strength, as appropriate, in concert with one another, for a common purpose.

If I were to search for a headline for this cycle of activity, it might be "God's love", "God's Care". I have in mind a strong, passionate desire to redeem. Evangelism and social action/welfare are essential and mutually strengthening parts.

The care God has for the lost, which we discover when we are saved, and which we express through the gifts given to us by the Holy Spirit, engage individuals and those in our nation's "corridors of power" when we work together as God intended.

Church and Public Policy

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Introduction

About fifteen years ago I was curate in a Northern beaches Sydney parish. A very able clergyman was addressing the issue of poverty and riches. During a break he asked me 'are there any Volvo drivers here?' From memory I said 'I don't think so'. He proceeded to have a gentle go at 'Volvo Christians' and the assumption that having that kind of car is a Christian's right. The next day we were driving in the parish behind a 'you guessed it' - Volvo with a fish sticker. As we overtook we realised it was the Church Warden who had been present the previous day! The point of this anecdote is that it perhaps shows both the danger (if we are legalistic, which I don't think the clergyman was) and yet still the importance of being specific on social issues to avoid abstraction and irrelevance.

In the light of this dilemma I have been asked to explore two questions theologically: 1. Given the nature of Australian society, what are reasonable public policy outcomes for the Social Issues Committee (SIC) to seek? 2. What are the best and most appropriate means of achieving such ends? More succinctly these are questions of *ends* and *means* or *product* and *process*.

I. Clarifying the Context and Alternative Approaches to the Question

I believe this seminar arose because of debate about how to respond to the proposed Federal Senate Sexuality and Gender Status Discrimination Bill in March. This would have abolished government funded religious bodies exemptions to anti-discrimination legislation e.g. to firing or not hiring practising homosexual teachers. There are four rough responses people might make to this as an example of the SIC's response to public policy issues which I will quickly state and respond to in inadequate detail.

1. *We should only be interested in the Gospel. Anything else is a distraction from our primary task of proclaiming Christ crucified.* While it is vital to keep the Gospel central this view is often based on a truncated trinitarianism that reduces all biblical theology to christological redemption. It neglects God's roles as Creator (Gen 1-11) and Spirit (Gen 1:2, Ps. 104, Rom. 8:18-27) in creating, sustaining and recreating the world against moral and social disorder. Further, in the Anti-Discrimination case the indifference of this view would inhibit Christians from living a Gospel lifestyle (which I assume is against homosexual practice - Gen 19, Judges 19, Rom 1:20ff) and allow a contravention of freedom of religion.

2. *An opposite extreme is that God's law should be Australia's law as we are a Christian country.* This Christian Democratic Party, Right to Life or Lyons Forum line, like the first view, collapses biblical theology into one category or epoch, but in this case, that of Law. It tends to absolutise one stage of Israelite and biblical history as a theocracy and makes it mandatory for all stages and all times, even in a pluralistic democracy. It ignores the priority of relationship, grace and gospel over law. Exodus 19:3-6 comes before Exodus 20, the beatitudes or blessings come before the Sermon on the Mount's commands in Matthew 5-7, Jesus' fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant and law in Rom 3-4 and the Spirit's interiorising of that work precedes the (debated) role of the law in the Christian life in Rom 8:1-4, 10:4, 13:8-10.

This law based view also falsely assumes that Australia is a Christian country. It ignores the fact that chaplains were only allowed under sufferance and that there was only one Bible and one Prayer Book on the first fleet. It is also very Constantianian - a perennial temptation of State Churches like the Church of England, but forgets that Australian Anglicanism has a different constitution. As we move towards becoming a Republic it risks appearing as an authoritarian, very Anglo-Saxon 'royal family Church' in a touchy-feely, pluralistic, 'Lady Di world' as Bishop Bruce Wilson has noted. We also saw this Law based view disastrously backfiring in the recent Western Australian abortion law fiasco where the battle for people's hearts and minds was clearly lost in the rush to legislate.

3. *Everyone else is lobbying so we should too or our interests will be forgotten.* This again neglects the significance of God's creation and maintenance of the world, the creative Word's structuring of it (Jn 1, Col 1:15-20, Heb 1:5) and the Spirit's renewing of it (Ps 104, Rom 8:18ff). It also neglects our calling to 'do good to all, especially to those of the household of faith' (Gal 6:10). Charity begins at home, in the church, it does not end there.

4. *Closely related to 3 is the view that we only seek to influence public policy when it directly and detrimentally impacts on the church.* e.g. church schools having their freedom of religion compromised by having to employ practising homosexual schoolteachers. This view ignores our common creatureliness and humanity with responsibilities for others. We should be concerned about violations of the legitimate freedom of religion of any groups as grounded in humanity's created freedom, Muslims seeking to observe holy days and build mosques included.

This position, like the first, reminds one, for all their courage, of the Confessing Church's belated response to Nazism in the Barmen Declaration of 1934 only when the Nazi takeover of the German Christians and challenge to the Lordship of Christ became blatantly obvious. Even Karl Barth, the main drafter of the declaration, admitted the belatedness of the response though not realising that a stronger theology of creation may have led them to cry out earlier for the Jews. As pastor Martin Niemoller said: 'First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me - and there was no one left to speak out for me!'

In sum all four approaches suffer from a truncated trinitarianism or implicit unitarianism of one sort or other.¹ In particular, they neglect the role of God as Creator and the cosmic the work of Christ, the Spirit and the scope of the Kingdom as 'creation healed'. This would broaden a restrictive redemptive approach and the application of biblical moral law (not civil or ritual law - a possible New Testament not an Old Testament distinction) and self-interested lobbying or concern for the church to the wider world. This broadening is based on something like 'the maker's instructions' or better and more personally on drawing out the implicit imperatives or created freedom entailed in our human nature and destiny². Without drawing on this sense of our created human nature and purpose biblical laws will appear authoritarian and arbitrary in the public arena.

In an allegedly pluralist society that is really a monism of money, economy and individual consumer choice a trinitarian and Reformed creational basis for individuality and plurality in community is our social strategy. This recognizes the legitimate sovereign spheres of family, education, work, health or welfare etc under God. They provide criteria for detection of idolatry and ideology, especially State and market ideologies taking over other spheres of life.³

The doctrine of creation undergirds Christian concern and prayer for politicians and public policy. It seeks to lay a platform of partial peace in a warring creation so that all might find complete peace, *shalom* or salvation in Christ through Gospel ministry (1 Tim 2:1-4). Our call is to seek the welfare or *shalom* of the city or polis as we live in exile in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:4-9, cf. 1 Peter). Public policy engagement is simply putting legs to our prayers for peaceful or harmonious social relationships.

II. Realistic Ends/Outcomes for SIC in Australian Society Today

I will tackle the question of realistic outcomes for the SIC in the light of SIC's various publics or constituencies. This is a key issue for any advocacy group so they do not exceed their brief. It involves clarifying both the SIC's responsibility to the Anglican Church and pluralistic Australian publics in all their diversity, before tackling possible outcomes in the light of your threefold brief as a SIC, namely:

- a. to advise the Archbishop and Standing Committee;
- b. to make public submissions without necessarily representing Diocesan views;
- c. to have an educative role in the Diocese.

I'll mainly deal with b. in this section and leave a and c till section III on process.

1. *Public Submissions - But Whose Public, Which Reality?*

The first edition of Richard Neuhaus's journal of religion and public life entitled *First Things* rightly said that 'the first thing to be said about public life is that public life is not the first thing'. That is true theologically, God is our first public - we live *coram Deo* - before God - but it is also true sociologically. People often assume a single public with a sense of common interest or good and a shared media ('*The Media*' - as if it is singular, not the plural of medium) which Christians address in neutral echoes of 'secular ... bromides' or a moral Esperanto.⁴ But Australian society is fragmentating into micro-publics or interest groups.

Take, for example, the new class sexually expressive elites of the quality press and ABC living in the inner city who experienced Keating's 90s mix of cultural (70s) and economic (80s) globalization much more comfortably than the disenfranchised older suburban middle-class and

country working class fed by right-wing talkback radio, some tabloids, and for some, Pauline Hanson.

In this fragmenting public context our political danger is to become or appear to be captive to particular interest groups as just another self-interested lobby group or party in a time when everyone is suspicious of interest groups except their own (which is naturally defined as the mainstream or 'all of us'). Labor is often happy to have church input on issues of social ethics like the Aboriginal issue, poverty and unemployment but not so keen on beginning and end of life issues and personal, sexual and anti-discrimination ethics which the Liberals (though not Jeff Kennett) are often more conservative on. To avoid appearing to be a single issue interest group requires biblical and theological consistent relational life ethic across social and sexual issues (public and public, boardroom and bedroom). This does not require exhaustiveness, but merely evenhandedness.

Such consistency is difficult, not only because of the complexities within and between the various issues, but because many tensions within the mainline churches on issues such as privatization, homosexuality, Hanson, Wik, euthanasia etc. echo the above-mentioned split in the middle class and distort our public reading of Scripture. While Karl Barth said that the public Christian should have 'the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other' - the trouble is, as Leslie Newbigin noted in commenting on European church social justice statements, you can often tell which newspaper they have been reading, but not which Bible passages.

It is vital therefore that in a time of impatience and simplistic solutions where time for sustained thought and civic discourse is constricted,⁵ that Social Issues Groups be better resourced to have the time for substantial theological thinking about the nature of civic society and the common good and to resource others with it in accessible forms. This may well mean taking on fewer issues at a more fundamental level, rather than allowing the various media to set the agenda.

2. *Expanding the Public Imagination*

We are called to counter today's fundamental failure of political imagination - the widely lamented lack of leadership today, where as Chronicles says 'without a vision the people perish', or as Boris Frankel reviews Australian politics, *From the Prophets, Deserts Come*.⁶ The church's main contribution will come not at policy level, where there is plenty of room for empirical disagreement over means, but through highlighting personal and ethical ends beyond the bankrupt *Tunnel Vision* (James Walzer) of a mere procedural republic of technical or economic means.

An undervalued role for the Social Issues Committee is to help fire the imagination of political debate through expanding the linguistic stock of the media, politics, civic discourse. One way is by providing a larger language to recapture and reconfigure for today the original Christian meanings of terms such as economy (Ephs 1:10 'oikonomian' - Christ's summing up of the whole economy of salvation), profession Heb 3:1, 4:14, 10:23), reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21) etc so that the hegemony of secular and economic language is challenged.

The church as an alternative *polis* or contrast society generated many of our modern political forms - 'civil society as we know it has its origin in the struggle for religious freedom' (Walzer). 'Popular education, institutionalized medicine, and the very concept of dialogical (elective) democracy in the Anglo-Saxon world generalize patterns which were first of all experimented with and made sense in free-church Christianity'⁷. SICs have a major contribution to make in recovering the Christian roots of these political practices when many public institutions are being

cut off from their roots by the threat of economic rationalism/fundamentalism/totalitarianism. Yet the SIC's contribution will be undercut if the dialogical democracy based in the right to dissent (on non-essentials) of congregationalist theology is denied by the tendency within some churches towards fundamentalism and sectarianism.

3. *Public Speaking: Thick and Thin - Leavening Dominant Languages*

How should Christians and SICs speak in public? 'For many Christians, perhaps especially the "social-action types" of both left and right, the native tongue is that of logical debate, common sense, detached objectivity, public opinion, cost-benefit analysis, and power politics - the public language of our secular, pluralistic society.' That may sometimes be necessary, but it is not sufficient. And it is dangerous. Many Christians thin down the paint of their language until it loses all Christian colour. Only if Christians re-train their minds and become fluent in their own native language will they develop the panache, creativity and discernment to be 'publicly relevant.' Only then will their forays into the public realm be more than 'me-too-ism.'⁸

Nonetheless, the temptation in Sydney, I suspect, will be to use, or for the Diocese to expect, a thick theological language without sufficient translation, a bit like more 'sectarian' Anabaptists like Stanley Hauerwas to a US Senate Committee on IVF explaining why Christians have children or Jim Wallis just saying to a Senate defence committee to turn the other cheek. One reason they can do this, paradoxically, is because they live in a culture that, for all its corruption, is more overtly Christian than Australia.

In contrast to the thin or thick extremes public Christians and SICs will need to become bilingual, like missionaries. They will need to know the thick, insider, native language of the Christian culture e.g. covenant, image of God, but be able to translate into the thinner languages of other public subcultures e.g. contracts, community, rights and responsibilities, human dignity, while always drawing on the latter.

John Yoder advocates something similar based on the sociopolitical significance of the Last Supper and Jesus servanthood and death. For him, Luke 22:24-30 provides the Church with an alternative, 'more solid' internal language of servant leadership to the lordship language of the Gentile rulers, 'the marketplace semantics' of 'the nations in their own terms' as 'benefactors'. Yet in allowing themselves to be called 'benefactors' they allow the church to call them to live up to their own language.⁹

Tim Costello is perhaps Australia's most successful translator of Christian ethics in the public domain, highlighting Christian values of community against the commodification of society, especially through gambling. However, I would go beyond just the catastrophic social consequences of gambling to probe the religious and idolatrous roots of the obsession with individual choice and market 'morality' as Paul did in his critique of idolatry in the marketplace (Acts 17:17). I tried to do this in an opinion page article on Gambling in Melbourne, asking what is the monument or symbolic essence, spirit or god of the city (polis)?¹⁰

A further helpful example from a time of economic flux like our own comes from the Anti-Corn Law and factory reform movements (leading to The Ten Hours Bill). They focused hopes and fears about industrial and economic change in the 1830s-40s through the concept of a 'moral economy' held by many across the religious and political spectrum. In an increasingly secular setting where bargaining required the rationalist, utilitarian language of 'expert' calculations uninterested in community voices,¹¹ Evangelicalism provided a familial language which fused the languages of romantic social organicism, patriarchy, liberal economics, 'Benthamism and political economy..

with ... moral purpose.¹² They leavened the language of economic and sociological expertise with the moral language of class reconciliation, redefining notions of work, wage bargaining and mutual responsibilities of employers and employees.¹³ We face a similar task in today's utilitarian and technical economic context in the midst of a global information revolution.

Opposition leader and practising Anglican Kim Beazley seemed to be asking for something like this larger, leavening language when at the National Anglican Conference he said 'The Churches have a powerful public voice. They lay down markers for communities and governments. That voice comes, however, not simply from skilled social analysis [the Brotherhood of St. Laurence and St. James Ethics Centre model]; that many others can provide. It comes because the churches meet their members' deep spiritual needs, which preserve fortitude and optimism among those with a religious commitment in most adverse circumstances, and enable them to withstand demoralising barbs'.¹⁴

4. *Reversing the Demoralisation of Christians in Media and Public Life*

The note of demoralisation is also an important one. Recently *The Age* has handed its previously purely Christian Saturday Faith column over to all comers. The first was an appalling apologia for humanism as the religion for postmodernity. It blamed Christians for all ills of the past two millenia and claiming humanist credit for anything good since then. I was livid. I wrote a letter to the Editor acknowledging the right of people to express pluralistic perspectives in the Faith column, acknowledging Christian faults, but protesting the extreme intolerance displayed towards Christianity, unlike that shown by previous Christian columnists. I then proceeded to attack the author's flimsy historical case. This was followed up by another Christian who wrote an excellent response to humanism in the Faith column, by other letters and numerous phone calls, all voicing encouragement from my original response. It is clear that many Christians have had enough. They often feel demoralised and this can in fact lead to a sense of 'being ashamed of the Gospel'. In fact silence is the characteristic demeanour of shame. Christians raising their voice in ethical debates provides a platform for proclaiming the Gospel, it has a key pre-evangelistic role as the great German theologian and ethicist Helmut Thielicke often argued.

III. Means and Processes for Reclothing the Public Square

1. *Congregational Educational Strategies*

The SIC's role of educating parishes and diocesan groups is a key role. For the church itself is an alternative *polis or public - polis* meaning not merely State or Government but patterns of social relationships, power, inclusion, reconciliation etc. According to Exodus 19:6 and 1 Peter 2:9 we are 'a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation'.

Sadly, as Newbigin notes, for all their good work, our 'denominational and interdenominational agencies for socio-political action are often distanced from the ordinary congregation...and detached from the gospel of forgiveness.' So they are unable to effectively link personal, ecclesial and political transformation. This is important in the light of Sydney's strong congregational theology. In the late 80s under Alan Whitham there was a push to deprofessionalise Anglicare (then HMS) so that it served and enabled the parishes in social concern (- my former parish of Malabar and its social concern arm *WorkVentures* was a good model of such parish based social concern).¹⁵ In line with this congregational equipping function the SIC needs to continue helping parishes theologically think through their social concern.

This could be developed further by encouraging existing Church agencies, small groups and also parish social justice groups to be set up and equipped to think theologically both globally and locally. SIC could provide a list of possible speakers on issues as well as study materials - long papers as committee products, shorter condensed versions, study guides that have been developed by the SIC. NSW Baptists seem to be doing some good work with their local churches in this way.

2. Public Policy Submissions and Statements

Despite having addressed the outcomes in this area above, it is necessary to say more about different processes for official statements and submissions. From the former to the latter there would be a descending level of authority and descending demands in terms of concensus and length of process. One of our problems is that we demand too high a level of certainty and concensus as if all issues are Gospel issues and not issues of Christian liberty and diversity.

a. *For Standing Committee to endorse public statements by the Archbishop would require considerable concensus and certainty or clarity.* They should be based on what we distinguished years ago (when I was on the SIC) as position papers or statements, not just discussion papers.

b. *Public policy submissions and comment by the SIC would best be made, through the SIC researcher, subcommittees and the endorsement of Christian public intellectuals as spokespersons on particular issues.* This is because of i. the necessity of timeliness; ii. the difficulties of getting larger concensus and iii. the proviso that these do not necessarily represent the Diocese officially. Rather than expecting social researchers, committees, Archbishops or Deans to develop expertise in all areas, the SIC and social researcher should be more like talent scouts looking for Christians who can build on their existing expertise - lay people as Moltmann once said, are often the experts on these issues. We have twelve such spokespersons in Melbourne, who are given training and media access.

c. This raises a question - *should lay Christians and clergy just be involved in public issues as private individuals or does official corporate presence give added clout and make it appear the Church is active?* In a recent fortnight I was asked to make press statements on the woman wanting to use her dead husband's sperm for insemination, IVF and indiscriminate genetic screening, Archbishop George Pell's statements about 'the pagan pill', the GST on food, Lambeth against euthanasia and practising homosexual ordination and marriage. Some I have made general comments on and passed on to the Brotherhood on Tax. But I generally say when they ask for *the* Anglican position that we do not have a Pope, I'll speak as *an* Anglican, but not representing *the* Anglican position. There are great opportunities, but it all depends on timeliness and a willingness to be part of the public debate without necessarily having the definitive word both within the Church or without. It is all part of keeping the rumour of God alive.

d. *At the same time as making timely public comments we need longer-range more substantial co-operative work on the philosophical issues behind the issues.* As an example Ridley College Centre of Applied Christian Ethics (CACE) plans to hold a conference on *Postmodernity and Sexuality* for 2000 before the General Synod Report on Sexuality. Simply tackling sexuality without tackling the issues of ethical and epistemological authority lying behind the current debate is merely treating the symptoms without the disease. Unless we do so we will not be really prophetic, but merely jump on the bandwagon of media identified issues in the quest for quick relevance.

From a philosophy of science and Reformed epistemological perspective I would argue that we need more foundational work questioning the value assumptions of those claiming a monopoly on empirical evidence, rationality and expertise. We need this to address what Basil Mitchell describes as 'The Layman's Predicament' when confronted with the conflicting evidence of various 'experts' from different disciplines and ideological stances.¹⁶

While recognising the great difficulty of translating specialised languages for non-specialists we need cross-disciplinary teams of theologians, sociologists and economists, doing this longer term foundational work for a wider audience. We are fortunate at Ridley that half our faculty have an interest and expertise in ethics, from medical, legal, philosophical and biblical perspectives. We also draw on the considerable expertise of many lay people.

There is a need for SICs and Ethics Centres like ours to work together. We would be happy to pool resources with various SICs where possible. We gained great help from Sydney Diocese SIC and Anglicare on the issue of homosexual marriage and adoption which I was able to submit to Victoria's Anti-Discrimination Board drawing on damning empirical studies from Charles Sturt University on children of gay couples. This helped in stalling that possibility (while acknowledging other legal rights for gay couples, though not full marriage).

There is now a vacuum at the national level for Anglican Social Issues comment due to the abolition of their commission structure. It is a vacuum that needs to be filled and that we might, together, in cooperation with other groups on particular issues, e.g. The Brotherhood on unemployment and tax, be able to fill together. With email things can be done very quickly and the 'tyranny of distance' be partially overcome. We might work together on some issues, complement each other on others. Resources are small and synergy and cooperation is the key.

3. Which Issues?

The question of small resources means that we need to carefully target them towards the most important issues. A recent letter to the Melbourne Anglican lamenting the Anglican Church's relatively low profile on the privatization issue compared to the Uniting Church highlights this contentious issue. When should the Church speak on public issues and which ones?

Some would say that there is greater biblical clarity on such personal moral, especially sexual, issues than on wider social issues like privatization or industrial relations or ecology. They think SICs should focus on bedroom not boardroom, pubic, not public issues. However, the difference is not so much between personal and political - the feminist slogan "the personal is political" was the Bible's first (Jesus' table fellowship with tax collectors, sinners, welcoming women etc was profoundly political) as between e.g. a relatively more clearly biblical ethical issue (anti-euthanasia as an implication of the commandment against killing) and a more ambiguous empirical and technical issue (privatization) on which there is more Christian diversity and liberty.

But there is biblical clarity on public issues like a Jubilee on third world debt which you are involved in as an SIC along with many Christian groups. Scripture is clear regarding concern for the poor and the necessity for redress of injustice to bring them back into community and prevent the development of long-term poverty. Scripture challenges us here at an individual, familial, national and international level. The Jubilee laws are not merely an inner-Israelite provision (Lev 25) but in a thorough biblical and trinitarian theology shows the way creation should work. The Jubilee model taken up in exile in Isaiah 61, is extended by Jesus in Luke 4 to Gentiles. But there is still much room for empirical debate about the best way to embody the

spirit of those texts in our changed economic scene. Nonetheless, if we ignore those issues there is a great danger that we only focus on more private and allegedly more clearly ethical issues which merely reinforces the privatization and stereotyping of the Church. The recent Lambeth resolution against homosexual ordination gained much more publicity than that against third world debt.

4. More Modest Modes of Speaking Publicly

The question we face is how to highlight the ethical dimensions of empirical and technical issues without pretending to be authoritative experts on such issues and compromising our true authority, the Gospel. If we speak too often and too officiously we might become like the boy who cried wolf - no-one will take any notice. It is here that attention to different biblical modes of speaking is helpful

One of our problems is the pressure to speak only legislatively or prophetically on every issue. The Western Australia abortion debacle was a case of using legislative weaponry unwisely without proper preparation of public opinion. 'He/she who is convinced against their will is of the same opinion still'. The use of unethical methods and disclosure of private information backfired badly and the abortion laws became the most lax in Australia.

Regarding the use of prophecy as a model the great French Christian Jacques Ellul said that if the Church really wanted to be prophetic it should speak before the rest of society on an issue not after! We need to recognize also that there are in Scripture different styles of prophecy - insider and outsider prophecy and both are needed. Elijah is clearly an outsider, but Obadiah was an insider in the court who was able to save the lives a hundred prophets from Queen Jezebel (1 Kings 18). We also need prophecy in the New Testament sense of the communal discernment of a prophetic people weighing up what the Spirit says specifically and how teaching is applied in 1 Cor 14 not the Old Testament sense of the inspired individual and the inscripturated 'thus says the Lord'.

We also need to remember that the Bible not only speaks prophetically in terms of God's intuitive inspiration, but wisely as the Wisdom Literature demonstrates. This insider literature has a more modest and empirical approach drawing on the experience and empirical sciences of the ancient world yet within a covenantal framework of 'the fear of the Lord as the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 1:7).¹⁷

My basic suggestion is that just as Scripture includes a range of perspectives e.g. legal, prophetic and wise, so the Church should be equally Catholic. Moving away from merely legal and big P prophecy allows more liberty to disagree and enter public debate without having all theological t's crossed and i's dotted. This allows for what Jacques Ellul also said is the greatest witness - for the Church to have people expressing different views on a penultimate issue but pointing to their ultimate freedom in Christ beyond that. The Christian brothers Peter and Tim Costello's disagreements on many issues and yet recently agreements against gambling and for the government's tax package are a good model here. Would that all Christians acted in such a brotherly or sisterly way towards each other in the public (and ecclesiastical) domain, always playing the ball, not the man or woman.

5. Having a Political Presence Without Being Party Political?

a. Temple's Principles and Middle Axioms

Archbishop William Temple's (1881-1944) mature social ethical method is a helpful model for distinguishing Christian principles from party political policies, yet without falling into abstraction. In his *Christianity and Social Order* he first revisits his failed mediation in the 1926 English coal strike where he ran aground on the intransigence and power of government, business and unions. The then Prime Minister Baldwin asked him how the bishops would like him to refer the revision of the Creed to The Iron and Steel Federation. This was widely felt to be a direct hit. We could compare Jeff Kennett, PM John Howard's and former PM Hawke's similar comments when challenged by churches. Let the Church look after the soul and the State the body they say.

Temple finds this attitude of political and economic autonomy to be peculiarly modern. While religion does not claim economic expertise on particular policies, it nonetheless subjects economics to moral principles.¹⁸ Temple joins the battle by spelling out some primary Christian principles. They are 1. Theological - God's creative and sustaining purpose and 2. Anthropological - human dignity, tragedy and destiny corresponding roughly to a creation, fall and redemption framework of biblical theology.¹⁹

The derivative principles are:

- a. freedom or respect for personality grounded in the liberty of the children of God and freedom from any other absolute sovereignty. Social progress is the expansion of the possibilities of expression of personality' and choice, especially respecting 'the personality of the poor'.²⁰
- b. Membership/social fellowship is the flowering of the principle of personality in human relationships. We are 'incurably social'.²¹ To preserve liberty the State should allow a range of mediating institutions e.g. the family, in which relationships and personality flourish.²²
- c. Service is derived from personal liberty and fellowship.²³

Temple realised, after his earlier flirtation with the Labor Party, that the Church could provide neither a programme nor become a party, but following the first of his derivative principles, must allow for Christian liberty in policy matters. The key is to work 'the primary principles of the Gospel into those secondary principles' making them into effective action guides without determining details (though as they say 'the devil is often in the detail'). Temple stressed that: the Church acting corporately should not commit itself to any particular policy. A policy always depends on technical decisions concerning the actual relations of cause and effect in the political and economic world; about these a Christian as such has no more reliable judgement than an atheist.²⁴

Temple then gave these derivative principles greater specificity as action guiding 'objectives' for the government. These came, through the Anglican layman J.H. Oldham, to be known as *middle axioms*. Oldham wrote 'Between purely general statements of the ethical demands of the Gospel and the decisions that have to be made in concrete situations there is a need for what may be described as middle axioms'.²⁵ John Bennett speaks as a theological educator on how to appropriately equip preachers 'who are not ... makers of political or social policy' to give guidance to its members or for SICs to provide to churches. He argues that if middle axioms 'become a part of the mind of the church it becomes possible for it more effectively to encourage its members and many voluntary groups to experiment with the support of specific policies'.²⁶

In line with his middle axioms Temple urges the government to consider that:

1. Every child should have a family that is be decently housed (something Peter Hollingworth acted upon in challenging Bob Hawke);
2. Every child should have the opportunity for education to mature years;
3. Every citizen should have income security to maintain a home and provide 1 and 2;
4. Every worker should have a voice in their business or industry and know that their work serves the common good.
5. Every citizen should have sufficient daily leisure, with two days rest in seven ... and annual paid holiday
6. Every citizen should have assured liberty ... of worship, speech, assembly and association.²⁷

Temple finally, deliberately separates his own more specific policy proposals or means in an appendix from his broad biblical principles and middle axioms. He recognises that many in the Church and outside will disagree. He strives for practicality and moves in a Labour like democratic socialist direction, but does not invoke Gospel authority. It is *a* not *the* Christian position, that he would not even put to a Synod.

b. *Temple's Method: Strengths and Weaknesses*

The advantages of Temple's middle axiom method are as a way of bridging principles and programmes and allowing us to be political while avoiding being party political. Middle axioms were best when they stringently related a Christian worldview and interpreted experience. This relies on enlisting lay 'experts' in a corporate, interdisciplinary, empirical approach, as in Temple's great *Men Without Work* (1938) with its graphic depiction of the experienced evil of unemployment as falling out of the common life. It captured the imagination through narratives and personal interviews, was well respected by politicians, and led to practical initiatives such as family allowances.²⁸ The Brotherhood of St. Laurence's research division provides a good model of this, though it needs to be buttressed by theological reflection.

However, several criticisms have been made of Temple's middle axioms method. Duncan Forrester critiques middle axioms' for being overly cerebral and static deductions from the faith. Ronald Preston agrees with Forrester that Temple drew the contrast between principle and programme too strongly and that there are times when the issue is clear enough for the Church to commend specific policies.²⁹

On the more conservative side Hensley Henson criticised Temple's COPEC Conference's (Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship, 1924) democratic socialism because Jesus' preaching of the kingdom was not a detailed programme, for lack of costing for its ambitious proposals and because industries could not function unprofitably. At times they did not let the facts get in the way of a good middle axiom! But Temple's more mature method largely avoids these dangers and Henson had a large axe to grind.³⁰

Temple's middle axioms also reflect a very modern (versus post or hyper-modern) and English idealist confidence in experts and empirical evidence which we no longer share. Temple's method was also elitist, being too clerical and non-conflictual, and leading to a kind of class group think.³¹ This is correctable, however, his unemployment inquiry being more open to lay empirical evidence from the victims and their characteristic method of narrative. The use of narrative as characteristic of Scripture needs to be highlighted also to balance the generality and rational abstraction of principles with an evocative appeal to the imagination.³²

Temple is also too sanguine about the value neutrality and autonomy of other disciplines, though he recognises 'the importance and yet insufficiency of the social sciences'.³³ Temple's critique of contemporary economics was largely right in the light of biblical psychology and ethics but weak in assuming economic laws are scientific generalisations from experience rather than imaginative theories and models.³⁴

Middle axioms also worked best within an established ethos of Christian values which is not easily transferrable to an Australian or a more pluralist postmodern situation. Nonetheless, translation is not impossible as there is more ethical consensus in society than we sometimes imagine. Even evil earthly fathers give their children good things to eat (Matt. 7:9-11).

IV. Conclusion

The Church and SIC faces difficult choices with the demise of the welfare state and the impartial, empirically oriented, Evangelically founded public service ethos as government increasingly abdicates its role to global capital. Does it succumb to individualism and its alleged substantiation in economic empiricism or do we challenge these assumptions at a more fundamental level? Does it merely make many *ad hoc* comments at the media's whim or should we challenge the whole framework? My answer has been a both/and one. Substantial fundamental work by the SIC challenging the basic paradigms with a delegated role of social comment on many particular issues to lay and clerical public intellectuals with particular expertise expressing an, but not *the* Anglican view.

In my very ambitious view we need a combination of Evangelical lay empiricism, activism and voluntarism exemplified in the Clapham Sect, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence's empirical analysis and listening to the poor, the foundational, presuppositional questioning of economic rationality³⁵, a strong trinitarian and creation basis for a plurality of social institutions (beyond economic monism),³⁶ the parish based social concern of *WorkVentures* along with a modified middle axiom method as yet relatively undeveloped and under-resourced by Australian Anglicans.³⁷

The SIC can play a strategic role in drawing together many of these resources, seeking not to have the last word in either Church or public, but setting the agenda for debate on public issues in Australian society on the issue behind the issues and equipping the churches and Christians in public life to demonstrate what it means to be a public that can live with diversity and liberty because it has a fundamental sense of unity in Christ.

Notes

¹ See my *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition in Trinitarian, Credal and Reformed Perspective: The Threefold Call*, Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, NY, 1998.

² See O. O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, IVP, Leicester, 1986 on the significance of kinds and ends for ethics.

³ This is broadly (though not uncritically) based in the Dutch Reformed Kuyperian and Dooyeweerdian tradition known as 'sphere sovereignty' which guards the autonomy of each sphere of creation and culture under God. It has much in common with the Roman Catholic social encyclical tradition with its principal of subsidiarity - decisions being made wherever possible by the particular groups most effected.

- ⁴ J. Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1988, 5, 6.
- ⁵ Eva Cox, *A Truly Civil Society*, ABC, Sydney, 1995, 8.
- ⁶ Arena Press, Melbourne, 1992.
- ⁷ John H. Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, Uni. of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1984, 92. Cf. Ch. 8 'The Christian Case for Democracy'.
- ⁸ G. Vanderwell, 'Speaking our Native Language', *Reformed Journal*, April 1995, 4. As the Jewish scholar Michael Walzer notes in *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad*, Uni. of Notre Dame Press, 1994, 16-19, a culture that does not allow the thicker, value laden languages of moral, cultural and religious particularity to flourish will soon find the thin language of politics becoming anorexic, living off starvation rations that cannot sustain the body politic. As churches we will need to keep the two in close touch with each other, less the first, church speak becomes a kind of ghetto language, and the second, secular speak becomes evacuated of all Christian content.
- ⁹ *Priestly Kingdom*, 160ff.
- ¹⁰ 'Gambling May Define Our City', *The Age*, 9/2/96, A15.
- ¹¹ Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, 156.
- ¹² Robert Gray, 'The Languages of Factory Reform in Britain, c1830-1860', in Patrick Joyce ed. *The Historical Meanings of Work*, Cambridge Uni. Press, Cambridge, 1987, 156-160.
- ¹³ Gray, 'Languages', 167, 172, 175-178.
- ¹⁴ *National Anglican Conference Journal*, 8/2/97, 10.
- ¹⁵ See my *Changing Work Values: A Christian Response*, Acorn, Melbourne, 1995, esp. ch. 3.
- ¹⁶ Ch. 1 in Basil Mitchell, *How to Play Theological Ping Pong: Collected Essays on Faith and Reason*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1990.
- ¹⁷ See R. Banks, 'The Role of the Bible in Bureaucratic Decision Making' in his ed. *Private Values and Public Policy*, Lancer, Homebush West, 1983, 29-43.
- ¹⁸ *Christianity and the Social Order*, (CSO), Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1942, 7-10. This traditional Christian perspective was lost after the Restoration of the monarchy in mid-seventeenth century England when Anglicanism abandoned judging economics and retreated to being merely one department of life. While 'the autonomy of technique' in the various departments of life is to be respected, it is not absolute.
- ¹⁹ CSO, 52.
- ²⁰ *Church and Nation*, London, 1916, 81.
- ²¹ Hans Kunnen, 'William Temple', unpublished paper, 27/3/1987, and CSO, 65.

²² Cf. the American neo-conservative Michael Novak, *Democracy and Mediating Structures: A Theological Inquiry*, American Enterprise Institute, Washington DC, 1980.

²³ Temple dropped a fourth derivative principle of sacrifice from the COPEC four of 1923 as too easily abused in a sinful, conflict-ridden world. We need justice between capital and labour or between nations 'before we preach corporate self-sacrifice'.

²⁴CSO, 29. Michael Horsburgh prefers the term 'policy principles' following from general principles and guiding policy decisions. Middle axioms imply an overly direct or deductive approach'. 'Middle Axioms and Social Policy: An Australian Perspective', unpublished paper, August 1989, 9 from which I have drawn much of this section.

²⁵ From the 1937 *Oxford Conference on Church, Community and the State*. Cf. P

²⁶ Quoted in Paul Ramsey, *Who Speaks for the Church?* Abingdon, Nashville, 1967, 14-16. Ramsey comments that the latter should be left to 'political prudence and worldly wisdom'. The Church's public task by contrast is to nourish and restore 'the moral and political *ethos* of our time' in specifically Christian ways. This can be done best through giving action-oriented 'direction' rather than specific policy directives. These, like Temple's middle axioms, provide a middle way between 'ethical generalities' or counsels of perfection and 'prudential specifics'. The latter, he rightly argues, lapse into 'the abstractness of concrete advice' because the Church is not in the government's role balancing concrete advice on one issue with its effects on many others (29). Politics is the art of compromise, both in the positive and negative senses of the term. Cf. also Dieter T. Hessel, ed. *The Church's Public Role*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1993.

²⁷ CSO, 99-100.

²⁸ From the Yorkshire Institute of Industrial Affairs (1933)..

²⁹ 'Middle Axioms in Christian Social Ethics' in his *Church and Society in the Late Twentieth Century: The Economic and Political Task*, SCM, London, 1983, 149, 153-4.

³⁰ Alan Suggate, *William Temple and Christian Social Ethics Today*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1987, 134. Henson's criticism of COPEC's interference in politics was hypocritical as he did the same on the conservative side, condemning strikes etc. even in his official episcopal capacity.

³¹ E. Norman, *Church and Society* E.R. Norman, *Church and Society in England: 1770-1970: A Historical Study*, Oxford Uni. Press, 1976 and D. Forrester, *Christianity and the Future of Welfare*, Epworth, London, 1985, 87-92 critique this from Right and Left respectively. Cf. Horsburgh, 'Middle Axioms', 13-15.

³² See Bp. R. Randerson, 'Anglican Middle Axioms', unpublished paper presented at the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, 17/6/95.

³³ Suggate, *Temple*, 70.

³⁴ Suggate, *Temple*, 100-2.

³⁵ See for e.g. former Melbourne University Professor of Economics Clive Beed's impressive body of work. C. Beed, *God's Economic Strategy: A Biblical Study*, Collected papers to Uniting Church Continuing Education for Ministry Seminar, Melbourne, (1990), Beed, C. (1991) 'Philosophy of Science and Contemporary Economics: An Overview', *Journal of Post Keynesian Economics* 14: 459-94. Beed, C. (1992) 'Do Value Judgements Affect Testing Economic Theory?', *International Journal of Social Economics* 19: 6-24. Beed, C. and Beed, C. (1995) 'Polarities between Naturalism and Non-naturalism in Contemporary Economics: An Overview', *Journal of Economic Issues* 30: 1077-1104. 'Realism and a Christian Perspective on Economics', *Review of Political Economy* 9: 313-33. yC& C Beed, 'A Christian Perspective on Economics', *Review of Political Economy* 9:313-33. Beed, C. and Gill, A. (1990) *Equity and God's Economic Programme: A Biblical Study*, Collected papers to Uniting Church Continuing Education for Ministry Seminar, Melbourne. C. & C. Beed, 'A Christian Perspective on Neoclassical Rational Choice theory', *International Journal of Social Economics*, 1998. Particularly pertinent at the moment is a work in progress 'Australia's Waterfront Container Productivity and International Benchmarking'.

³⁶ See C. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, Cambridge Uni. Press, Cambridge, 1992, I. Barns, 'Recovering Peacable Christian Difference', *Colloquim* 28:2, Nov. 1996:50-67; 'To Reframe the World: Recovering the Doctrine of Creation in Christian Practice'. *St. Mark's Review*. Part 1, No. 166, Winter 1996:9-14. Part 2, No. 167, Spring 1996:23-30. 'Going Public: Reflections on Zadok's Role in Australian Society', *Zadok Papers*, S86, Autumn 1987.

³⁷ On *WorkVentures* see my *Changing Work Values: A Christian Response*, Acorn, Melbourne, 1995, ch. 3. On undeveloped Australian middle axioms see Horsburgh, 'Middle Axioms,' 21-22 although Peter Hollingworth did make a fairly abstract attempt in 'Christianity and Social Order', Barry Marshall memorial lecture, 1980, critiqued by Horsburgh, 3.

